

Table 5
Characterizing the Severity of Fluid/Electrolyte Imbalance

Mild: Some deficits or abnormalities in laboratory values exist, but they do not seriously impair the patient's circulation, organ function, or level of functioning. Examples:

- Marginally elevated blood urea nitrogen (BUN) or high or low sodium in a patient taking diuretics
- Increased thirst in a patient who has had diarrhea for two days but is still drinking adequate amounts of fluid

Moderate: Some deficits or lab abnormalities exist that impair or are likely to impair circulation or organ function but are not immediately life threatening. Example:

- Mildly increased lethargy or confusion or decrease in blood pressure in a patient with a sodium level of 155 mEq/L whose consumption of food and fluids is reduced as a result of influenza

Severe: Deficits or abnormalities causing significant, life-threatening risks or problems with circulation, organ function, or activities of daily living. Example:

- Rapid recent BUN elevation to >100 mg/dl in a patient whose BUN was normal a month ago.
- Rapidly increase lethargy and confusion in a patient with a recent illness whose sodium is now 123 mEq/L or who is hypotensive